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40% of Pakistan's Youth Want Islamic Law: Survey

Ahead of crucial elections marking the first democratic transition in Pakistan's history, more than 90 per cent of the youth believe the country is heading in the wrong direction while nearly 40 per cent think Shariah or Islamic law would be the best political system, a survey said. These are among the key findings of a new survey by the British Council that focussed on youths between 18 and 29 years, who are expected to play an important role in the May 11 general election. The 'Next Generation Goes to the Ballot Box' report, published today, indicated deep pessimism among the youth, many of whom will be voting for the first time. *"In 2007, 50 per cent of the youth thought Pakistan was heading in the wrong direction, today that figure is 94 percent,"* Zaka said. A majority of respondents – 38 percent – said Islamic Shariah would be the best political system for Pakistan while 32 per cent backed military rule and only 29 per cent favoured democracy, according to the survey that covered over 5,200 youths across the country. Those who backed Islamic law said it was the best system for "promoting moral behaviour", eradicating corruption, ensuring access to electricity and water, and providing people with healthcare and education. Sixty-four per cent of male youths described themselves as conservative or religious while the figure for females was 75 percent.

Arab World Faces $89 Billion Food Gap By 2020

Deputy Ruler of Dubai and Minister of Finance, has warned that the food crisis in the Arab world is getting bigger and it is expected to reach $89 billion in 2020. "Estimated at $41 billion in 2010, the food gap is widening and expected to reach $89 billion in 2020," he told a conference in Dubai on Tuesday. Currently there is a need for agriculture investment worth $65-80 billion to fill this gap, Shaikh Hamdan added. He attributed the expansion of food crisis in the Arab region to weak infrastructure, unhealthy investment environment, poor financial resource, lack of scientific researches as well as the undeveloped agriculture services. *"The recent agriculture projects in the Arab world were not effective enough and didn't translate to the required result in food production along with the increasing demand on food."* The Arab world is prey to the global food price volatility, as most countries in the region are net food importers. A shortage in food grain in 2007-08 had pushed up the food prices globally and had an adverse affect in the region, pushing up inflation, prompting countries to formulate food security policy and raise buffer stock. While most of the Arab countries are rich in agriculture resources, the total area of cultivated land represent only five per cent of the overall lands of the Arab world while it is also represent only 1.4 per cent of the fertilised area available for.agriculture.

UK Aid 'Helping Fund Re-election Campaign' of PPP

A leading development economist has alleged, in evidence to a parliamentary probe, that the BISP was being used to buy support for Pakistan Peoples Party, a report published in British newspaper The Daily Telegraph said. "The fact that it is called Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP) tends to suggest that there is what is called clientelism," Dr Ehtisham Ahmad, who held several senior positions at the IMF, told The Daily Telegraph. *"The more you give the more benefit there is to the party that bears the Bhutto name."* Britain's Department for International Development (DfID) was pouring money into a scheme riven

by “clientelism”, according to Ahmad, a visiting fellow at the London School of Economics. *“It is not stolen to the extent to which previous cash transfers were stolen, but this is the mechanism, which is funded partly by DFID, to make friends and influence people. This is the re-election campaign of Mr Zardari, which is funded by DFID,”* he said. *“Well done.”* Britain has rapidly expanded its assistance in recent years. Pakistan is on course to becoming the biggest recipient of UK aid, receiving £450m per year by 2015.

North Korea Warns Military Cleared to Wage Nuclear Attack Against United States

South Korea says North Korea has moved a missile with “considerable range” to its east coast after an unnamed spokesman for the North Korean army warned the U.S. Wednesday that its military has been cleared to wage an attack using “smaller, lighter and diversified nuclear” weapons. South Korea’s defence minister said Thursday the missile moved is not capable of hitting the United States. Kim Kwan-jin dismissed reports in Japanese and South Korean media that the missile could be a KN-08, which is believed to be a long-range missile that if operable could hit the United States. Kim told lawmakers at a hearing that the missile’s range is considerable but not far enough to hit the U.S. mainland. He said he did not know the reasons behind the missile movement, saying it “could be for testing or drills.”

The range he described could refer to a mobile North Korean missile known as the Musudan, which has a range of 1,800 miles. That would make Japan and South Korea potential targets, but little is known about the missile’s accuracy. North Korea has railed for weeks against joint U.S. and South Korean military exercises taking place in South Korea and has expressed anger over tightened sanctions for a February nuclear test. The army spokesman said in a statement carried by the Korean Central News Agency that troops have been authorized to counter U.S. aggression with “powerful practical military counteractions.” National Security Council spokesperson Caitlin Hayden called the threats “unhelpful and unconstructive.”

Anti-Muslim ‘Radicals’ Driving Myanmar Unrest, Experts Say

Two years after a repressive junta ceded power, Myanmar is grappling with a surge in religious extremism that experts trace to anti-Muslim “provocateurs” including radical Buddhist monks. At least 43 people have been killed while mosques and Muslim homes have been destroyed over the past fortnight in central Myanmar, in a wave of violence that witnesses say seems to have been well organised. “It is clear that there are some agents provocateurs with radical anti-Muslim agendas at work in the country – including influential Buddhist monks preaching intolerance and hatred of Muslims,” said Jim Della-Giacoma, a Myanmar expert with the International Crisis Group think-tank. *“Also, the systematic and methodical way in which Muslim neighbourhoods were razed to the ground is highly suggestive of some degree of advance planning by radical elements,”* he added.

Monks – once at the forefront of the pro-democracy movement and viewed with reverence in this devout Buddhist-majority nation – have been linked to the unrest. Some members of the clergy have been involved in the violence, while others are spearheading a move to shun shops owned by Muslims and only visit stores run by Buddhists, identified by stickers showing the number “969”, which has become a symbol of their campaign. “When the profit goes to the enemy’s hand, our nationality, language and religion are all harmed,” said Wirathu, a monk from Mandalay whose anti-Muslim remarks have come under recent scrutiny. *“They will take girls with this money. They will force them to convert religion. All children born to them will be a danger to the country. They will destroy the language as well as the religion,”* he said in a speech put online.